**EQUITY IN PUBLIC ART FUNDING**

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*Introduction*

The following is in response to the issue of racial equity in Cuyahoga Arts and Culture [CAC] investments that surfaced in the past year. Over the past several months, we met with leadership of CAC, Community Partnership for Arts and Culture [CPAC], several CAC grantees, researchers in economic development, urban geography, and the arts, and others. In all of those meetings, we addressed the four questions discussed in this document, which reflects our observations and recommendations.

In 2016, Cuyahoga County passed a renewal of the cigarette sales tax for continuous support of the arts with the fund managed by CAC. At the start of this second ten-year funding cycle, CAC has gathered information from the community through its *Year-Long Community Listening Project* that concluded with a report published in January 2017. Our fundamental belief is that the continued evolution of the arts funded by the cigarette sales tax is essential to the maturation of Cuyahoga County and its communities. We, like CAC, consider the arts, and the culture that they produce, an important public good.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Our focus was to gain greater understanding of CAC’s role in the county’s arts sector in general, and relative to the African American community, the gap between what should have been awarded compared to actual allocations. Several data points guided our preliminary exploration as benchmarks: [1] Since 2007, CAC’s total revenue was in excess of $160 million. [2] African Americans represent 30 percent of the county’s population and over 50 percent of Cleveland, the county’s largest city. [3] Approximately one-third of the county’s smokers are African American; likely the same proportion contributes to the sales tax.

*Background*

Numerous studies have shown Cuyahoga County’s population to be bifurcated by income and race. As the result of historical institutional barriers, significant black population is concentrated in core city neighborhoods of Cleveland [and some inner ring suburbs], with the city being more than 50 percent black. Thirty percent of the county’s 1.2 million persons are African Americans. [2016 American Community Survey] Racial discrimination and exploitation in education, employment, financing, and housing have been and continue to be reality in black communities. Increasingly, studies describe these and other negative effects of discrimination against African American communities.

For example, studies of the criminal justice system show the impact of disproportionate incarceration of African American males, which has seriously impacted their economic status. National statistics indicate that over one-third of all black men’s lives have been interrupted by involvement with the criminal justice system, typically between the ages of 18 and 35, exactly at their most creative and productive age. Black girls and women face similar pressures. Added to incarceration, the cost from fees, fines, and lost employment opportunities, which derive few community benefits or public goods, result in another indirect form of taxation

Discrimination in the arts has also been noted. For example, the *New York Times* [June 27, 2016] reported on a study by Actors’ Equity that showed that women and minority actors and stage managers in New York City are getting fewer jobs and often wind up in lower-paying shows than white male theater artists. African-American performers, for example, got only 11 percent of the principal roles in Broadway and touring plays, and 9 percent in musicals. African-American performers did better in Off Broadway with about 14 percent of the principal roles and 22 percent of chorus jobs. But Actors’ Equity said that whites were generally hired with higher contractual salaries at all levels. We can assume that a similar pattern exists in Cuyahoga County.

The issue of race in CAC’s allocations of the cigarette tax surfaced to the level of public discourse in Fall, 2016. As stated in an article *Individual Artist Grants, Race, and Public Benefit* [Bachtell], this has led to a broader community dialogue around, not just this specific issue, but also the impact of systemic racism along the entire spectrum of the grant award system in the art world. We have expanded that discussion to include art-related jobs, goods, and services produced in Cuyahoga County.

*Discussion*

**Question 1: Has CAC established racial diversity policies, goals, and benchmarks for its internal operations and for that of its grantees?**

In spite of racial equity having been front and center in discussions in 2005-2006 during the formation period of CAC, when assurances of fairness were made to the African American community, the issue of racial equity remains seriously unresolved for CAC and the community. In response CAC recently provided board and staff the opportunity to participate in training offered by the Institute for Racial Equity. In addition, CAC’s Roadmap approved December 2016 established equity as a value: “We recognize that our society is challenged to overcome a complex web of inequities, and we believe that CAC is responsible for operating with an awareness of legacies of privilege and power that have effects on opportunity, access, and resources. This awareness will inform all of our policies and practices, including funding criteria, program development, hiring, and resident engagement.” Interestingly, this statement is ambiguous and not explicit about race.

With even stronger concrete language, the national Grantmakers in the Arts has made racial equity in arts philanthropy a primary focus: “We move forward from our assessment that **racism** is one of the most pressing issues of our time, and that meaningful progress on advancing racial equity will have significant positive impact on challenging other discrimination-based injustices. Therefore, our current priority is working against **racism** by working toward racial equity in arts philanthropy.” [March 9, 2017]

Both statements represent intent and possible movement toward deconstructing past barriers against participation in grants in the arts. But Grantmakers in the Arts is far more explicit about racism. The unanswered question is whether intent and policy will result in substantial change. Will concerns about privilege and power actually eliminate racial disparities, or will another ten-year funding cycle ensue and end with the same disappointing results in the African American art community?

Studies and data do not bring about change of or by themselves; but they can target the need for critical changes in direction and strategy. CAC has limited internal data about its investments. CAC and the artistic community could benefit from baseline data about racial disparities in art funding in Cuyahoga County, as well as from objective data about CAC’s contribution to the county’s total art market. By strategically using data and relevant research findings, CAC could be in a stronger position to leverage funding to effectuate real change rather than continue to institutionalize disparities.

**Question 2: How has CAC located and identified African American artists and African American art organizations, other than through word of mouth?**

We are aware that the process of identifying individual African American artists can be a daunting task. Locally, the process was delegated by CAC to The Community Partnership for Arts and Culture (CPAC), which managed the Creative Workforce Fellowship program. Staff held workshops in various communities to recruit African American artists for the Fellowships and to assist them with completing applications, if needed.

CPAC’s data shows that between 2011 and 2016, 1,454 applications were reviewed and of these, 256 (17.6 percent) were from African American artists. Twelve were approved, or 4.7 percent of the African American applicants. We are not aware of the size of the pool of African American artists from which CPAC could have drawn applicants, but we know that it is substantially larger than 256, and the approval rate for Fellowships extremely low.

Now that CAC has terminated its relationship with CPAC, we are not aware of any organization that CAC will contract with to fulfill the role of working with individual artists. CAC has established a planning committee, which is in the process of developing new approaches to support artists. But CAC could benefit greatly from CPAC’s lessons learned about identifying individual African American artists, as well as from its current efforts in gathering data about the overall economic impact of multiple art sectors.

Demographic data, including race, is not consistently collected or reported by the other CAC grantees.

**Question 3: How much of CAC’s funding invested in the arts was allocated to African American organizations and artists and what efforts have been made to increase funding?**

From records provided by CPAC for the Creative Workforce Fellowship program, we learned that from 2009 to 2016, only 16 [10 percent] of the 160 Artist Fellowships were awarded to African American/African Origin artists. This represented $285,000 or 9.5 percent of the total $3 million allocated to CPAC.

**Using a hypothetical one-third benchmark, nearly $1 million of CPAC’s funding should have gone to the African American artists over that 8 year time period.**

Ninety-eight percent of CAC’s revenue was awarded to other non-profit organizations and events, which amounted to approximately $157 million over CAC’s first decade of operations [2007 to 2017]. How much of this funding benefited African American organizations directly or their communities indirectly is not available because CAC does not require this data. Only media and marketing information was available. In fairness to CAC, we assume that some amount was allocated, but likely less than expected.

**Using a hypothetical one-third benchmark, nearly $52.3 million of CAC’s funding should have gone to the African American community over the past 10 year time period.**

A contributing factor to the low percentage of African American arts and art organizations receiving CAC funding could be with the review panels – used by both CPAC and CAC. We have serious questions about bias in the filtering and scoring processes, even if conducted blindly by such panels. Some African American artists who applied for funding through CPAC reported being “graded” for grants, with most that we interviewed receiving low grades or a “0.” We know that CAC’s process nearly starved the oldest and most venerated of African American institutions – Karamu House - presumably because of low grades. The scoring process and points system need further critical investigation and review.

**Question 4: What is the estimated contribution of CAC to the gross revenue, both private and public, emanating from art production [goods, services, products, and employment] for Cuyahoga County?**

It is clear that nonprofit arts and culture organizations are economic drivers of an industry that supports jobs, generates revenue, and promotes tourism. We suspect that CAC reaches across most of the county SIC employment sectors; but CAC has yet to systematize or capitalize its role in these employment sectors, for the benefit of the public.

A recently published study of the economic impact of the theatrical arts and related industries in Cleveland and Cuyahoga County by CSU for CPAC found that “the performance industries generated $900 million in economic impact in 2015, a typical year. That includes the labor income of 2,382 direct theatrical and performance-supporting employees earning $58.9 million.” [*Crain’s Cleveland Business*, June 8, 2017] CPAC is also examining several other art sectors in the county.

Additionally, CAC reported in January 2017 that it supports the local economy “by building stronger, more resilient arts and culture organizations that impact the local economy and attract new residents to the region. The organizations that CAC funds annually support more than **10,000 jobs** and spend more than **$380 million** in our community.”

These two data points have been reported by CPAC and CAC, respectively. However, we are not certain about their parameters or whether they have been over or under-estimated. But we are certain that there is much potential for CAC in the county’s entire art market to leverage equitable outcomes.

We recognize that the private philanthropic community also contributes significantly to the arts in Cuyahoga County, but we are not aware of how much of this benefits African American artists or organizations, or minority producers of goods and services that support the arts. Nor are we aware of efforts to increase this funding by partnering with private sector corporations.

*Conclusion*

From our inquiry to date, we have serious concerns about CAC’s capacity to be good stewards of the black community’s share of art funds. Equity gaps over the previous ten-year funding cycle, as well as weaknesses in data collection and analysis, methods of community outreach, and the lack of a focused policy on racial equity indicate an organization not yet ready to tackle the difficult issue of racial equity. Time is of the essence; some of these matters can be reviewed and handled by board decisions now, rather than by committee.

A simple cost benefit analysis would demonstrate stark institutionalized inequality. And the social and financial costs of the cigarette tax to the African American community have been extremely high, with the benefits, extremely low. Finally, it appears that CAC practiced a filtered-down approach to the allocation of funds to the African American community, already burdened by the tax of racism, and its concept of “investing in the arts” appears to be more “media mirage” than actual benefits when it comes to that community.

**We cannot help but consider whether the African American community would be better off today, if it were the direct beneficiary, without CAC, of its own $5.3 million annual art tax share (approximately $53.3 million over the past decade).**

*Recommendations*

The following are our preliminary recommendations that are in no sense final. Much work remains in understanding art and culture in a county deeply divided by race.

* Conduct two foundational studies from which benchmarks and goals can be established:
* A racial disparity study of both public and private supported arts in Cuyahoga County
* An assessment of CAC’s role in and contribution to the gross county production from the total arts sector to Cuyahoga County [building on the work started by CPAC]
* Collaborate with both the public and private arts sectors, including corporations, private funders, and donors, to maximize the county’s full potential to direct funds to the art community in general and African American artists and organizations in particular.
* Ensure that CAC’s internal operations has the structure to ensure equity:
  + Establish an annual benchmark for the funding level the African American community should receive, compare to the actual, and publish a report.
  + Formalize internal CAC operational and contracting policies and create a structure to disseminate and monitor specific requirements for CAC grantees, related to diversity.
  + Require all grantees to report uniform demographic data, including race/ethnicity and gender of grantee employees and contractors of services and products; aggregate; publish the data.
  + Ensure there is no hidden racial or gender bias in grantee scoring by revising the process.
  + Initiate a process for capacity building for African American artists to be better positioned to compete for public and private funding.
  + Establish a pipeline and stepping-stones in the African American community for development of artists at the earliest possible developmental stage to remediate past discrimination.
  + Create a structure for community input that allows responses to objective data and policy recommendations.
* Work with county officials and the Black community to establish a Racial Equity Advisory Committee that would:
* Interpret the racial disparity baseline study and ensure that its findings and recommendations are incorporated in CAC’s operating structure and policies;
* Guide how CAC can remedy the gap between actual and equitable funding to African American artists and art organizations;
* Support establishment of a separate African American organization to receive and manage the cigarette tax art revenue for the African American community.

*End Note*

1. Because of confusion between the terms art and culture, we are separating the two for the purpose of this discussion. Art production can be measured with indicators specific to it, while culture would require a different form of metric and is further complicated by sometimes being synonymous with entertainment. Thus, art and its measuring metrics is our focus. Discussion on culture and entertainment, and measuring their economic, educational, and social value as well as interactions across them will require further study. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)